

VZCZCXR09112
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHAM #0027/01 0041602
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 041602Z JAN 07
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6371
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 000027

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE ALSO FOR S/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/04/2017
TAGS: PGOV PREF ECON SMIG SOCI IZ JO
SUBJECT: IRAQIS IN JORDAN

REF: A. 06 AMMAN 9012

- ¶B. 06 AMMAN 6781
- ¶C. 06 AMMAN 6761
- ¶D. 06 AMMAN 177
- ¶E. 05 AMMAN 3963
- ¶F. TD-314/60389-06

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Iraqis in Jordan generally remain integrated into Jordan's economy, and many continue to travel frequently between the two countries. UNHCR is optimistic that the GOJ will respond positively to its request to carry out a socio-economic survey of Iraqis who are in Jordan but permission was still pending as of January 4. There is little hard data on their conditions here, and a methodical survey to determine vulnerabilities would help the GOJ and donors plan programs aimed at assisting them. End summary.

¶2. (U) With international attention refocusing on growing Iraqi populations outside Iraq, post provides the following overview of their current situation.

Heavy Traffic in Both Directions

¶3. (U) Iraqis have come to Jordan in several waves. The earliest and smallest dates from the brief 1958 union between Iraq and Jordan, which ended abruptly with the overthrow of Iraq's own Hashemite monarchy. King Abdullah remains close to some members of the Iraqi branch of the Hashemite family, including former UN PermRep Prince Zeid. Other waves of Iraqis came to Jordan during the Iran-Iraq war; at the time of the Operation Desert Freedom; over the course of the sanctions regime, and, finally, in the wake of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

¶4. (U) Even before 2003, long-standing ties between Jordan and Iraq, as well as economic hard times in Iraq, meant that the long-term and transient populations of Iraqis in Jordan already totaled about 200,000. Economic links between the two countries produced considerable traffic in both directions.

¶5. (U) Since Operation Iraqi Freedom, traffic in both directions between Jordan and Iraq has remained quite heavy. For example, during a period of heavy traffic this past summer at the Karama-Trebil crossing)- the only official land crossing between Jordan and Iraq) interior ministry officials reported some 2,000 people (some Iraqis, some Jordanian, and a few others) crossed each day from Jordan into Iraq, and some 2,400 of all nationalities traveled in the other direction. Additional traffic passed through Amman's airports. Some media reports claimed that there was a surge in movement to Jordan following the February 2006 bombing in Samarra, but GOJ Interior Ministry officials claim

there have been no significant changes in movement over the past year.

¶ 6. (C) In January, 2007, the Amman office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated the current net inflow of Iraqis to Jordan was about 1,000 per month. The U.S. military's Civil Affairs Liaison Team (CALT), which is attached to Embassy Amman and often has personnel working at the Karama-Trebil crossing, estimated that in November, 2006, the net inflow of Iraqi citizens to Jordan was approximately 150 persons each day. The Ministry of Interior has offered to provide more precise numbers of net inflow later in 2007, when it will have fully deployed a new entry/exit database system (Ref A).

Current Population

¶ 7. (C) Estimates of the number of Iraqis range from 500,000 (according to one Jordanian Interior Ministry official) to 800,000 (as an IOM official recently guessed). Jordan's non-Iraqi population (which includes Palestinian refugees and Jordanian citizens of Palestinian origin) is about 5.5 million.

¶ 8. (U) Anecdotal reports suggest that the Iraqi population in Jordan to some extent reflects the diversity of Iraq's own population. Sunni Arab Iraqis probably form the majority of Iraqis in Jordan, although Shi'a Arab Iraqis are a close second. There are few Iraqi Kurds here.

¶ 9. (U) The socioeconomic profile of Iraqis in Jordan also tracks with that of Iraq's own population. The conventional wisdom (repeated in some recent U.S. press pieces) has it that Iraqis in Jordan are mostly rich. While the Iraqis of

AMMAN 00000027 002 OF 003

affluent West Amman do indeed cut a high profile, Iraqis in East Amman, Irbid (and, increasingly, in the scruffy satellite city of Zarqa) are largely working class who -) like their Jordanian neighbors -- live on the margins of society with few options for gainful employment. Many of the laborers in Jordan's booming construction industry, once dominated by illegal Egyptians, are now Iraqis (and often Shi'a.)

Legal status

¶ 10. (U) Despite the upheavals of the past two decades, Jordan and Iraq have maintained their long-standing visa-free travel regime. Iraqis seeking entry to Jordan as short-term visitors are interviewed by Jordanian border officials and, if the interviewer is satisfied, he stamps a visit permit (usually good for 90 days) in the traveler's passport.

¶ 11. (U) The GOJ has clearly made an unpublicized policy decision to look the other way as tens of thousands of Iraqis, who are obviously not bona-fide visitors, enter and remain in Jordan for extended periods. While some better-off Iraqis are able to qualify for one-year residence permits by agreeing to deposit a significant sum in a Jordanian bank, most Iraqis in Jordan are what American officialdom would call "out of status."

¶ 12. (U) Most of the Iraqi construction workers here are, like their Egyptian colleagues, illegal overstays, but there have been no large-scale round-ups of foreign illegals. Those Iraqis whom the GOJ has deported have mostly been suspected of non-immigration offences. However, there are also recent anecdotal reports that some GOJ officials are, for the first time, beginning to enforce the law against some Iraqi "visitors" who are "out of status." Until 2006, Iraqis could secure an additional three-month extension of their "visit" without having to re-enter Jordan; this is reportedly now becoming more difficult.

¶13. (U) Following the November, 2005 Amman hotel bombings which killed 60, the GOJ implemented an unpublicized policy of turning away most military-age male Iraqis applying for entry into Jordan. In December 2006, an Interior official confirmed to emboff that this remains GOJ policy.

¶14. (U) Under an MOU that it signed with the GOJ in 2003, UNHCR's Amman office can accept asylum claims. This offers the few hundred Iraqis here who have acquired documentation from UNHCR as refugees some protection against refoulement, but the residency status of recognized refugees is not regularized in the process and they are therefore not entitled to work or receive government services. In April 2005, the GOJ also informed UNHCR that it would no longer recognize the blanket "temporary protection regime" that UNHCR had tried to establish in this region between 2003-2006, and asked UNHCR to limit issuing asylum seeker ID cards to only the most vulnerable Iraqis who approach their offices. UNHCR has registered approximately 21,000 Iraqis as asylum seekers seeking refugee status to date. Despite the limited protections this registration confers, demand has spiked since December. UNHCR Amman is currently hiring new staff to handle the influx, but appointments for registration appointments are backed up now until May.

Conditions

¶15. (U) Iraqis in Jordan do not live in camps, whether formal or informal. So far, Iraqis continue to integrate into Jordan's urban economy and housing market. Most Iraqis here are self-supporting, or are relying on the support of relatives. The Government continues to provide access to emergency medical care for Iraqis, though they do not have access to Jordan's modest government-subsidized health insurance system. Some Jordanian public schools, already overcrowded prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom, admit Iraqi children, but others turn them away.

¶16. (U) While there is little hard data, international NGOs and local charities increasingly recount anecdotes about middle- and lower-class Iraqis running out of funds to sustain themselves. However, most Iraqis in Jordan appear to be only slightly worse off than Jordan's own population, whose PPP-adjusted per-capita income is only 4,700 USD. A methodical study of Iraqis in Jordan and their living conditions is clearly called for.

Comment

¶17. (C) The USG should continue to pay close attention to the
AMMAN 00000027 003 OF 003

humanitarian concerns of Iraqis in Jordan, and a professional survey of their numbers and conditions would help clarify GOJ and international planning on the issue. Traffic from Jordan into Iraq remains almost as heavy as movement in the other direction, suggesting that many Iraqis and Jordanians assess conditions in some parts of Iraq to be acceptable. As the numbers of Iraqis in Jordan mount, and as more of them here exhaust their personal resources, they will place an increasing strain on the GOJ's resources. The GOJ will likely welcome any international offers of help in aiding a temporarily increased population of Iraqi expatriates, but is strongly resistant to defining the situation as a refugee problem, per se.

¶18. (C) While acknowledging the GOJ's de facto generosity to Iraqis seeking temporary haven, some advocates are beginning to call on the GOJ to grant more Iraqis de jure residence rights here. It is unlikely the GOJ will move in this direction. The 1970 &Black September& 1970 civil war between refugees and natives is still painfully fresh in all Jordanians' minds. Jordanians of all origins will regard skeptically any proposals that are perceived as a move toward

formally accepting a large new population of foreigners.

¶19. (C) Aware of renewed international attention to the issue of Iraqis in Jordan, the GOJ is preparing a report on the subject that it says it will release soon. The December, 2006 visit of PRM PDAS Richard Greene (ref A) helped further focus the GOJ on the issue. Ambassador has engaged with senior palace officials and the Foreign Minister to urge GOJ approval for an independent, professional survey on Iraqis in Jordan. Further discussions with the palace on this issue are planned in coming days.

Visit Amman's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/amman/>
HALE